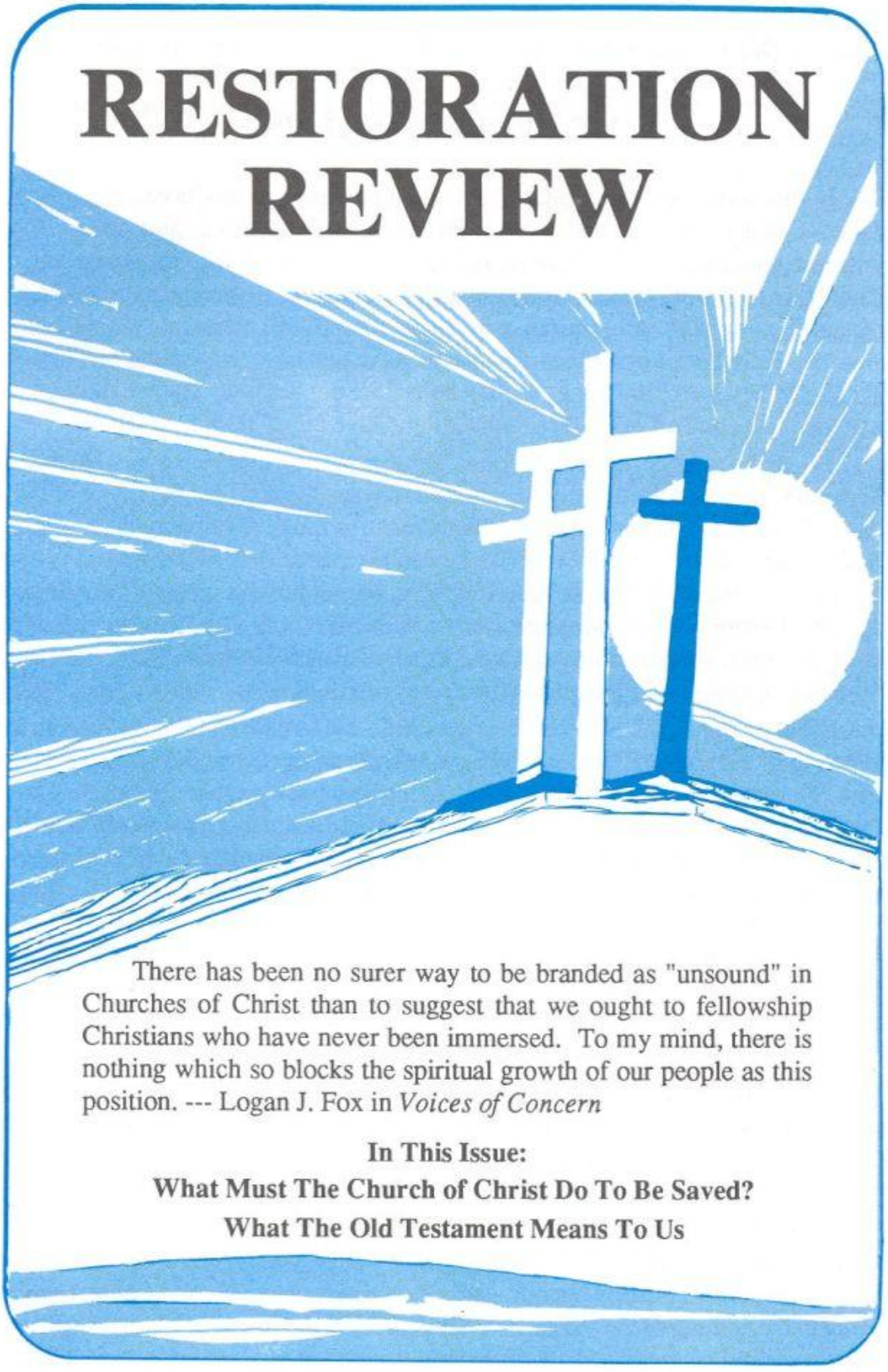
RESTORATION REVIEW



There has been no surer way to be branded as "unsound" in Churches of Christ than to suggest that we ought to fellowship Christians who have never been immersed. To my mind, there is nothing which so blocks the spiritual growth of our people as this position. --- Logan J. Fox in *Voices of Concern*

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What Must The Church of Christ Do To Be Saved?

What The Old Testament Means To Us

Volume 33, No. 1 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **January, 1991**

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What the Old Testament Means to Us. . . No.1

WE BEGIN IN PSALMS

In this series on what the Old Testament means to us as Christians our main concern will be its spiritual value. Problems such as dates, authorship, form criticism, historical analysis all have their place and are dealt with in commentaries. Our aim in this study is to better appreciate what the Old Testament meant to Jesus, the apostles, and the early church, who knew of no "Old Testament," for to them it was "the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. 3:15). Or they were "the things written before for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

Wisdom, courage, hope, salvation. These pregnant terms express what the old Scriptures meant to the early believers, and they are the stuff for the living of these days. This series assumes that they should mean as much or more to us. It is tragic that so many of us have followed a hermeneutics that has left us indisposed to what our Lord always referred to as "the Holy Scriptures" and who spoke of them in such trenchant terms as "the Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn. 10:35). Yet we often denigrate such writings with such a putdown as "But that's in the Old Testament."

The Old Testament should be precious to us if for no other reason because it was the Bible of our Lord. He heard it quoted in the family circle and read in the synagogue. He studied it in the synagogue school and memorized extended portions of it. He announced himself as Messiah to his home congregation by reading from the scroll of Isaiah. He taught his disciples again and again that his mission was "that the Scriptures might be fulfilled." The Scriptures were constantly upon his lips—when he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, when he was crucified, when he was raised from the dead. He followed the rabbis of his day by dividing Scripture into "the law, the prophets, and the psalms," but unlike the rabbis he saw in those Scriptures things concerning himself. It is evident that he saw his passion and resurrection as foretold in these writings (Lk. 24:45-46).

We begin our series with installments on the Psalms, for this is the place to start in realizing the spiritual value of the Old Testament. The Psalms are the heart of the Old Testament. In reading them one soon sees that, like the Methodists on the American frontier, Israel sang their religion. So, the psalter, as it can be called, is first of all a hymnal. It is also a prayer book. Ps. 72:20 refers to them as "the prayers of David the son of Jesse."

And yet the Psalms are more than hymns and prayers. They are history in that they often refer to Israel's historic past. They are prophetic in that several psalms point to the coming of the Messiah. They are rich in theology in that they delve into such profound subjects as the nature of God and man, sin and salvation, covenant love, eternal life.

We will only notice in passing some things that are interesting but not crucial, such as the fact that David is credited with writing less than half of the 150 psalms, 73 in all according to the editors' note to each psalm. Ps. 72:20 presents a slight problem in that it states that the prayers of David are ended at that point, but some psalms prior to that were not by David and some that followed were. This is explained in part by the fact that the psalms were written over a period of some eight hundred years and were gathered and edited at different times. There are numerous psalmists beside David. At least eleven psalms are attributed to Asaph. One is' attributed to Moses. Many are anonymous. Still we can refer to David saying such and such in the Psalms when it may not have been David, for he was the principal author. Jesus and the apostles seem to have done this.

Who wrote them is not as important as that they were written and that they came to be regarded as holy Scripture by God's people in times of crisis. The psalter has a character all its own among Old Testament writings, and it will serve our purpose to list some of its unique features.

1. *In the Psalms men are speaking to God instead of God speaking to men.*

This means that the Psalms are not a revelation of God in the same way most of the rest of the Bible is. While we learn much about God and his will for us, it comes not from what God says but what men say in their struggle to know God and enjoy his fellowship. Take Ps. 19:14 for example, which C. S. Lewis esteems as the greatest lines in the history of literature:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,

O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

This Scripture is as compelling as if it were from the mouth of God himself, but it is a prayer of David, a sinful man. It teaches us the nature of true religion: a heart and tongue attuned to God.

Another sublime instance of this is Ps. 139:23-24:
Search me, a God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;
And see if there is any wicked way in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting.

David realizes that God already searches his heart and knows all about him, and yet he pleads for God's scrutiny. It is a prayer for mercy and forgiveness. It is a plea for intimate fellowship with God. It teaches us that we cannot harbor wickedness and be acceptable to God. And yet this great lesson comes not from the mouth of God as much as from the longing heart of man.

2. *The Psalms hold out hope for eternal life.*

While such hope is generally absent or at least ambiguous in the Old Testament, the psalmists believed that they would "dwell in the house of the Lord forever." One can hardly find a more encouraging passage anywhere in Scripture than Ps. 73:23-24. After confessing how foolish and ignorant he once was, living on the level of a brute beast, Asaph says:

Nevertheless I am continually with You;
You hold me by my right hand.
You will guide me with Your counsel,

And afterward receive me to glory.

One can hardly be more definite about going to heaven than that, but David in Ps. 16: 10 expresses equal certainty:

For You will not leave my soul in Sheol,

Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

The apostle Peter quotes these lines on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, contending that in this passage David was not talking about himself but the Christ who was to come after him. But this passage shows that David was referring both to himself and to "the Holy One," for he goes on to say, "You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." This psalm indicates the joyous faith of the Old Testament believers, using such language as, "My heart is glad, and my glory rejoices. My flesh also will rest in hope."

If we learn nothing else from our study of the Old Testament, we now know that a joyous hope of life beyond this world is not restricted to the Christians of the New Testament.

3. *The Psalms declare that God is worthy of praise and He is to be praised lavishly.*

More than anywhere else in Scripture God is exalted not only as praiseworthy but One who is to be praised extravagantly. The Psalms are full of praise to God, not only from his chosen people but from all human kind, from all animals, from all creation, from all of nature, things animate and inanimate. Praising God goes on and on, psalm after psalm, as if there is no way to praise Him enough. The birds of the air and the fish of the sea are called on to praise God, as are all the hosts of heaven. Even the mountains clap their hands with joy because of His mighty works. But it is His own covenant people who are to praise God most of all. Ps. 103:1-2 is an outstanding example:

> Bless the Lord, O my soul;
> And all that is within me, bless His holy name!
> Bless the Lord, O my soul,
>
> And forget not all His benefits.

One psalmist supposes that even the dead will rise to praise God (88:10), while another ventures that the wrath of man praises God (76:10). Another opines that the dust (of the grave?) will praise God (30:9), while still another calls upon the poor and the needy to praise Him (74:21). God is praised in song, in word, in the dance, and with instruments of music. He is praised for His mighty works, for His lovingkindness, and for being the God of Israel. David praises Him "because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (139:14) and "because Your lovingkindness is better than life" (63:3).

While God appears to demand praise from His people, it is an indirect kind of demand, just as a great painting demands praise. Once a person realizes even a semblance of the majesty and glory of God he or she cannot help but praise Him. It is more out of spontaneity than out of duty.

This is what the Psalms can mean to us in terms of praising God. As we linger with the psalmists and become intoxicated with both their love and awe of God, we too will praise Him as if it were the natural thing to do. It is interesting how they speak to themselves in their call for praise —"Praise the Lord, O my soul"—as if it is the one thing they cannot help but do, God being who He is. It can be the same way with us.

4. *The Psalms tell us what God wants above all else and what is the essence of religion—a humble and contrite heart.*

Even though most of the psalms were composed during the time of temple worship and animal sacrifices, the psalmists make it clear that God really desires "clean hands and a pure heart" (24:4). Now and again the question is raised as to what one must do to be saved, or as Ps. 15:1 puts it, "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle?" Not once is there a reference to the sacrifice of animals which was so much a part of the Jewish system. The

answer is centered in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly before God as it is in the prophets. A key reference is Ps. 51 where David is penitent of the sins committed against another man's wife, and where he says, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me." He also says some remarkable things about what God expects of His people:

O Lord, open my lips
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.
For you do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it;
You do not delight in burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—

These, O God, you will not despise.

In the same psalm David allows that God will accept the likes of burnt offerings, but only in reference to a heart attuned to God. This is a crucial lesson to learn about the nature of true religion, one that we are slow to learn even as Christians with all the light we have that they didn't have. As the poet Robert Bums put it:

In all the pomp of method and of art,
When men display to congregation's wide

Devotion's every grace, except the heart.

5. *The Psalms are full of the grace of God.*

They arc the book of Romans of the Old Testament. God is a forgiving God who looks with mercy upon sinful man. Justification is by faith, not of works. Ps. 103 lines all this up: God forgives all our iniquities, heals all our diseases, redeems us from destruction, crowns us with lovingkindness and tender mercies. It also says, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy." Moreover, He is a God who does not deal with us as our sins deserve. Some passages exude God's grace, such as Ps. 32:1-2: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity." Then there is 37:5:

I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I have not hidden.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"

And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

The sons of Korah, who are given credit for Ps. 84, go so far as to describe God as one who not only gives grace and glory, but also "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly."

However we explain it in terms of Christian theology, there is no question but what the Old Testament saints were justified by grace through faith apart from works of the law. No one has ever been saved any other way. It is the same God and He has always saved the same way—through His grace and mercy.

6. *The Psalms are certain that God will in the end triumph overall His enemies and that His purposes will be realized.*

Ps. 29 pictures God sitting as King forever and blessing His people with peace. Ps. 24 makes it clear that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." Ps. 19 depicts God as in complete control over nature and the universe. He has even pitched a tent for the sun. Ps. 62 describes him as our refuge, one who can be trusted at all times and in every crisis. Ps. 63 shows there is never a cause for worry, for His hand always upholds us. The psalm also says:

I meditate on You in the night watches.
Because you have been my help,

Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice.

7. *The Psalms point to the coming of the Messiah.*

A number of poems known as "royal psalms," which had to do with the coronation of Israel's king also came to have Messianic import. They are interpreted as such by New Testament writers and are applied to Christ, especially Ps. 2, 72, and 110. Ps. 110 ("Sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool") is the most often quoted in the New Testament, including a quotation by Christ himself. While Ps. 45 is a wedding song, it is quoted by the writer of Hebrews and applied to Christ. Our Lord quoted the Psalms from childhood until his agony on the Cross, applying their Messianic import to himself, such as Ps. 22: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me." Two other New Testament writers quote other lines from that psalm and apply them to Christ.

8. *The extensive use of instrumental music in the Psalms in praising God is impressive.*

Those of us in Churches of Christ who sing only acappella and never use instrumental music cannot help but be impressed by the emphasis given to instruments in the Psalms. Virtually every instrument known to the ancient world is used in the praise of God. An entire orchestra of instruments is listed in Ps. 150. That they sang along with the playing of

instruments is apparent from 149:4: “Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and the harp.”

The argument we have always made that instruments were authorized in the Old Testament but not the New hardly applies to the Psalms, for it is not a matter of the instruments being “authorized” or legislated. They were used out of the spontaneous devotion of the people. They praised God in every way available to them, which would of course include instruments of music. We need to question a hermeneutics that keeps saying, “But that’s in the Old Testament.” We should at least be able to understand how our Christian friends who choose to use instruments consider it odd that we elect to make use of all the spiritual values in the Psalms except “Praise Him with stringed instruments” (Ps. 150:4).—*the Editor*

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WISDOM FOR A NEW YEAR

Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every new year find you a better person.—Benjamin Franklin

As another new year dawns (I write this on Dec. 22) I find myself in search of something special to say to my readers, something from the wisdom of the ages. The new year of 1991 is special in that it is really the beginning of the last decade of the century in which we were all born. The year 1990 may have been the beginning of the 1990s but it was really the last year of the ninth decade.

That means the 20th century will not end until the last day of the tenth decade, the year 2000, not 1999. So, when our dear brother Norvel Young invites all of us to join him in Firestone Fieldhouse at Pepperdine University at 7 p.m. on Jan 1, 2000 to celebrate the beginning of a new millennium, he is jumping the gun on the calendar. He is a year early; the party should be on Jan. 1, 2001! But that’s OK, for Norvel has always been a step ahead of the rest of us. The Lord willing, I will be there to celebrate the new millennium with him—a year early!

Well, now that we have that settled we can talk about wisdom for the new year and the new decade. I said this is the century in which we were all born. I should have said nearly all of us, for there is a dear old lady living with us who was born in 1896, whom I named “Mother Pitts” 46 years ago. When I stepped into her room on a recent morning and saw her asleep in her lift chair, now decimated by old age, I thought about the stories I had heard about how beautiful she was in her youth. Ouida says her mother was so

beautiful that it was a problem to her. Men and women alike would stare. I first met her when she was half her present age. She was still stunningly beautiful at 47. You can understand that I was eager to meet her daughter who was away at college! But from the first day I met Mother Pitts it was her inward grace that impressed me even more than her outward beauty.

I lingered in her room that morning, just the two of us, thinking about how "our years pass like a sigh," as a psalm puts it. Her hair, now silky white, has thinned some. Once the ideal height for a woman (just like Ouida!) she is now at least a full foot shorter, and her back is bowed so much that she shuffles with a stoop, bent over as if she were looking for something on the floor. And she shuffles along in the few feet of her confined world only with help. Like a baby she sleeps most of the time, and like a baby she wears diapers and is syringe fed. And she is confused; usually she knows who we are but sometimes she doesn't.

Sometimes it is amusing. I still joke with her as I always have. One evening as we were tucking her into bed I asked her if she knew who we were. She did, calling us by name. I asked her if she knew Ouida and I were married, reminding her, that after all it was partly her fault! "No, I had no idea that you were married," she said. But in a moment she added with a twinkle in her eye, "But I'm not surprised."

The Mother Pitts that I've known most of my life is of course gone, but not altogether. Not only are there traces of her once natural beauty but her inward grace is still intact. She never complains. She still says thank you, and in her desperate helplessness, which she senses, she expresses appreciation that we are with her. She assures us that she is not afraid, and when we pray with her she often says something like "That was a beautiful prayer." When I say "You know we love you, don't you?," she says, "Yes, if I didn't I'd just keel over." I can understand why Ouida doesn't want her in a nursing home.

There is something about Mother Pitts that is the wisdom I am looking for, and it is best expressed by simplicity of life. I am not sure what the reformer John Huss meant when, while dying at the stake, he cried out his last words, "O holy simplicity!," but it may have been akin to what I see in Mother Pitts' life. The simple life—simple faith, simple virtues, simple wants, simple manners, simple dress—is the life of wisdom. It may have been Jesus Christ that Huss was referring to as holy simplicity, for his life was great because it was simple and simple because it was great. Longfellow said it well when he wrote, "In character, in manners, in style, in all things, the supreme excellence is simplicity."

I had not thought of Jesus teaching a science of goodness until I read these words from the poet Schiller, “A childlike mind, in its simplicity, practices that science of good to which the wise may be blind.” Jesus was teaching the essence of his own life when he said, “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light” (Mt. 6:22). The eye probably refers to the mind and soul, to all that one is inwardly—his or her character, attitude, desires, motives. If these be good or single —I would say simple—then one is right-minded and full oflight. To be the opposite of this, to be filled with darkness, is to be self-deceived, dishonest, insincere. The simple life has no ax to grind, no point to prove, plays no games, and is not phoney. It is content to seek first the kingdom of God and leave the results to God.

Jesus laid down a simple and yet a profound rule for one who is pleased to live an unassuming life: “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Mt. 6:34). It took one immersed in the wisdom of God as was Jesus to come up with such a life-changing maxim: *Each day has troubles enough, so don’t borrow troubles from tomorrow.*

Mother Pitts lived by that rule. While life was already difficult enough for her, it became more trying when she was widowed with still part of her family to raise. She lived in day-tight compartments, taking the days one at a time and looking to God to sustain her one day at a time. He never failed her; she never failed him. Even though life was a struggle for her, she always had time and the resources to help others.

That is the wisdom for the living of 1991 and this century’s last decade, *the simple life lived in simple trusting faith.*

I’ve looked for aphorisms that express that wisdom in other ways, such as this one from old Ben Franklin, who had a way of saying things in a down-home kind of way: “Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every new year find you a better person.” There is enough wisdom and courage in those words for the facing of this hour and the living of these days.

We have only one war to wage, with ourselves in the struggle against sinful pride. We wage peace with our neighbors by being peacemakers, not just peace lovers, and that includes the church. And we should always be improving ourselves, thus preparing ourselves by God’s grace for another world in God’s tomorrow.

A better person in 1991 than in 1990, and all for the glory of God! The wisdom for the coming year is just that simple. But in closing I include one of my favorites from the great preacher Charles Spurgeon: “There are no crown wearers in heaven that were not cross bearers here below.”

It is cross bearers that become crown wearers! There is enough wisdom in that one to spill over into the next century.—*the Editor*

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WHAT MUST THE CHURCH OF CHRIST DO TO BE SAVED?

Even if we do not hear it as much these days, *What Must One Do To Be Saved?* has long been a favorite "big meeting" sermon among our people, and rightly so, for it is a question right out of the Bible. In giving that title a twist and asking what the Church of Christ itself must do to be saved I am not of course referring to the personal salvation of its individual members. Surely many of the most faithful Christians in the world are in the Church of Christ, and I am not in this article questioning in the least the genuineness of their faith.

I am rather asking what the Church of Christ as a church or as a denomination, if that term is allowed, must do in order to be "saved" as a viable witness to the Christian faith in today's world. What must it do to escape extinction in the decades ahead, or if not extinction, relegated to an insignificant southern or Tennessee-Texas sect? What must it do to save its own people from boredom, mediocrity, and irrelevance? What must it do to escape from its legalistic, sectarian, and isolationist past (if indeed this is a correct assessment) and become a meaningful part of the larger Christian world? What must it do to be true to the Bible and to its own heritage in the Stone-Campbell unity movement, and yet move out on the growing edge toward being truly ecumenical, truly catholic, truly holy, and truly apostolic?

I speak as part of the Church of Christ when I ask what we must do to be liberated from our depressing self-service to being joyous servants of others for Jesus' sake?

Some will doubtless insist that there is nothing to do and that my question is both inappropriate and offensive. I would urge such ones to realize that when it comes to "being what the church ought to be" in the world we have not made much of an impact. Who pays any attention to us? Who listens to us? In what ways have we made any real difference in our world? Not only are we not growing but we have actually decreased in members by the tens of thousands in recent decades. Our typical service is sterile, routine, and boring. Many if not most go to church more out of duty than out of joyous expectation. Our young men are going into business rather than into the ministry. Foreign missions are on the decline. The most revealing sign of all is that too few of our people are joyous, fruit-

bearing Christians. Some of our more candid leaders concede that we are dying on the vine.

Others may respond to this by saying that these things are true of other churches as well as of us. That may be true, and it might also be said that as far as the West is concerned we are now in the post-Christian era, that where Christianity was once strong it is now dying. A new Christian age may emerge again in Asia and Africa, but it is dead or dying in the West.

My answer to that is that each church must endeavor to save itself from decadence. I am concerned for Churches of Christ. There are others working for renewal among the Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, and all the rest, and I wish them well. The best way for us to save each other and become the one Body of Christ together is for each to save itself. We can help all other churches to become more like what God wants them to be by becoming what God wants us to be. I like the prayer of the Chinese Christian who prayed, “Renew your church, O God, beginning with me.”

Moreover, I am persuaded that we in Churches of Christ have been guilty in ways that most other churches have not. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, true, but some of our sins in Churches of Christ have been particularly grievous, and it is these that we must overcome if we are to be saved.

In this first installment I will mention one of the most important things that we must do without delay.

We must confess that we have been wrong about some things.

This should begin in our own assemblies and among our own people. From them it will reach out to others. We must first show some tough love among ourselves, including soul-searching repentance as a people. It will be wonderfully liberating when we can honestly say, “We have been wrong,” and in the long pull it will be encouraging to our people and will give them hope of our eventually becoming a more responsible and spiritual people. It will also gain us the respect of our neighbors. I know, for I have seen it work when in visiting other churches I have occasion to confess that we in the Church of Christ have often had a wrong attitude. It always impresses those that are at first critical, especially when one from the Church of Christ is in their service as a visitor, which itself is shock enough!

The sin that we must confess is our patent refusal to have anything to do with other churches and other Christians. In the old days we attacked other churches from the pulpit and mailed out tracts condemning “denominationalism,” implying of course that we were not a denomination. On the radio we “skinned the sects” and we debated anyone who had

the nerve to take us on. We soon gained the reputation of believing that we were the only true church, the only faithful Christians, and the only ones going to heaven. We succeeded in causing other believers to resent us if not hate us. When they showed such resentment our response was that they didn't really want the truth. In rejecting us they rejected God himself!

In recent years this "skin the sects" attitude has declined. We are now more mature, better educated, wealthier, and more responsible. Sociologists would say we are moving from sect-type church to a denomination-type, which is typical of religious bodies our age. But we are almost as sectarian and exclusivistic as we have ever been. We are now more subtle, more benign in our sectarianism. These days we may not talk about other churches and believers the way we once did, but we still have nothing to do with them. It is as if other churches did not even exist. If it is a joint Thanksgiving or Easter service, no matter how glorious a service it may be, you can count on the Church of Christ having nothing to do with it. Even if it is a joint community effort involving all the churches, such as a campaign to help the homeless, we will not be in on it. It is now common knowledge that if the Church of Christ does anything it does it alone. The Church of Christ has nothing to do with other churches and other Christians (period!)

I am thankful that I can tell people in other churches that this has begun to change. We have numerous churches that are breaking out of this debilitating sectarian syndrome, but they are still far too few, and they are often labeled as "liberal" by the others. About fifty of our congregations pull an "E" in our directory of churches, while many more are moving in that direction. The "E" stands for ecumenical, still a bad word among us even if it is eminently biblical. If we are to be saved these avant garde churches must greatly multiply.

The exclusivism I refer to is evident in our party lingo. Everyone understands that "the Lord's people" or "the Lord's church" refers only to Church of Christ folk. If one of our girls marries a Baptist she is supposed to understand that he is not "a member of the church" even when she considers him a faithful Christian.

We can be saved from such sectarian exclusivism without compromising any truth we hold. Our preachers can belong to the ministerial alliance and we can join "the denominations" in a Thanksgiving service without approving of any doctrine we consider false, just as we can read a commentary written by a Methodist (as we do) or sing hymns written by Roman Catholics (as we do) without approving of any error practiced by those churches.

How can we be the salt of the earth and the light of the world when we have nothing to do with anyone else? Our people spend all their lives in our congregations without ever having heard a minister from another church in one of our pulpits. Most of our people never attend any service of any other church unless it be a funeral or a wedding. We are supposed to be a people who believe in and work for the unity of all Christians—that is our heritage!—but how can we be a witness for the oneness of all believers when we isolate ourselves from all other believers?

There is only one answer to all this: We must change our ways and confess that we have been wrong. We are wrong when we imply that we are the only true church or that we are the only Christians. We are wrong when we suggest that people have to belong to what we call the "Church of Christ" to be saved and go to heaven. We are grievously wrong when we believe that if people are "not of us" they are going to hell.

In order to believe that we are right we do not have to believe that everyone else is wrong. Jesus warned his disciples against a self-righteousness that assumes that if others are "not of us" they cannot be doing the work of God (Mk. 9:38-39). Our own pioneers never thought of themselves as the only Christians and the only true church, forging the motto, "We are not the only Christians, but Christians only."

Our preachers and elders need to say it before our assemblies, *We have been wrong!* I am positive it will have a revolutionary effect for good. There is nothing we could do that would be more liberating for our people. And our leadership would be surprised as to how many would say they never believed that way anyhow!

While we are at it we must confess that we have also been wrong about instrumental music. I concede that this will be hard for us to say, but it must be said if we are to be saved. In coming clean of our partyism we must strip off what we are so widely noted for —not so much our good works but that we believe it is a sin to use instrumental music.

And that is what we must confess, not that we sing acappella, which of course is all right, but in naming something a sin that the Bible does not name a sin, and for making the use of an instrument a test of Christian fellowship. We have something like 3,000,000 sisters and brothers in the Christian Churches/Disciples of Christ who share our heritage, who are "Christians only" and who have been baptized just as we have, but whom we reject because they use instrumental music.

This is our sin, and this we must correct if we are to be saved. We must make it plain that while we choose to sing acappella it is a matter for each church to decide for itself, and that we will no longer condemn others when they differ with us on this and we will no longer make it a test of fellowship. Some of our people can even say that for *them* it would

be a sin to have an instrument in that it would violate their conscience. That too is OK so long as they do not impose their opinion on others, making a law where God has not made one.

But again our leaders will find when they at last announce that they will no longer condemn others because of instrumental music that most of our people never believed in doing that in the first place, especially our younger people. Only recently in a large Dallas area Church of Christ a class of sixty young marrieds were asked by the teacher for a show of hands of those who found instrumental music to be a problem. Only a few raised their hand. Several surveys in recent years reveal that among the rank and file of our people instrumental music is a non-issue. And yet it is one of the main reasons why we have been stereotyped as sectarian and antiquated in the eyes of the world.

We have been wrong about some things! It would be a glorious proclamation, and it would cause folk to pay more attention to the important things we are right about.—*the Editor*

(To be continued as a series)

The unexamined life is not worth living.—*Socrates*

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A PROPHECY ABOUT HELL

Edward Fudge

We Restoration Movement folks do not speak often of prophecy, especially not of the modem variety. That is noteworthy since our movement sprang from the same general roots as the Seventh Day Adventists and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, both of whom bestowed prophetic status on their respective pioneers, Ellen G. White and Joseph Smith, Jr.

We have always viewed our forefathers more modestly (and scripturally) as simply pioneers who were right about some things and wrong about some others. This makes all the more striking a prophecy by Moses E. Lard, whose Quarterly is still quoted among us and whose work remains influential even where uncredited. In 1879 Lard published a 50-page booklet entitled “Do the Holy Scriptures Teach the Endlessness of Future Punishment?”

Dr. Jimmy Allen of Harding University, a beloved Christian brother of integrity and conviction, told me about Lard's booklet. He had the university librarian to send me a copy printed from the library's microfiche.

Lard's chief point concerned the Bible's usage of the Greek and Hebrew words translated "eternal" in our English versions. He concluded that the words simply signify "age-lasting," and that one cannot know for sure whether that is literally endless in any given instance by the mere use of the word itself.

Because he found this to be the case, Lard rejected as a necessary doctrine the majority opinion which says that God will cause the lost to suffer conscious torment forever with no hope of end. That traditional understanding, he noted, has created unbelievers of "a large class of thoughtful men. . . of high morality and judicial fairness of mind." Because he concluded that Scripture is not clear on the matter, Lard also declined espousing as a fixed view the notion that the suffering of the lost *will* come to an end.

Then came his prophecy. His own times were not such that open-minded study of this subject could take place, brother Lard wrote, although he observed that "many thoughtful men" already rejected the "traditional theory." But that would change, he continued:

> Belief in endless future punishment is destined to wane. With it, moreover, is doomed the present tyrannous orthodox sentiment which denies to dissent freedom of speech. Men dare not now utter aloud their conviction on the subject. But the day is at hand when they will be free. Manly independence will, at last, assert itself; and intolerance will grow gentle. Mark the course of coming events, and remember this foretelling.

Brother Lard's "foretelling" was especially meaningful to me, seeing it was almost exactly 100 years after he published it that I began what I thought was to be only a research project on the subject of final punishment. Before the project ended, however, I had changed my own mind from the traditional theory, based on evidence now published in the 500-page book titled *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment.*

Much material is available today that Lard did not have. If he had its use, I believe he would have reached the same conclusion Leroy Garrett and I have both reached, that Scripture does clearly teach that the lost, having endured conscious punishment meted individually in divine justice, will be totally destroyed body and soul, die the "second death" and perish with everlasting destruction. Lard did conclude, as I have, that there is no biblical basis for the opinion that God will make the lost indestructible and then torment them in fiery pain forever.

Lard's prophecy also proved true about the coming change in attitude. During the past eight years, in presentations before scholarly meetings and popular forums, at universities, churches, and seminaries, as well as in living rooms, my views have met most often with understandable surprise at the confessedly new idea but also with a willingness to evaluate biblical evidence afresh.

Usually someone says he has reached the same views privately. Sometimes one or two people appear unwilling or unable to reckon with new thoughts on this subject, and probably not on other subjects either. They therefore decline to join that growing group of open-minded students whom Lard applauded a century ago.

So, dear brother Lard, you were right. The time has come when belief in endless punishment is waning, the "tyrannous" sentiment is on the decline, and "manly independence" is asserting itself in full view. But, as we both know, we live in a fallen world of fallen people, which includes both of us. So I will also tell you of one presentation I gave on this subject which concluded with the master of ceremonies informing me that his people would be praying for me to repent of my unorthodox views so that I would not find myself in hell.—*Box 218026. Houston. TX 77218* (Edward Fudge's book referred to above may be purchased from Restoration Review at $23.50 postpaid.)

A Doctrine That Makes Atheists

As a child, Robert Ingersoll heard a preacher proclaim the doctrine that God subjects sinners to unending torment in hell. Ingersoll decided that if God was like that, then he hated Him. Later he wrote of this belief that it "makes man an eternal victim and God an eternal fiend. It is the one infinite horror. Below this Christian dogma, savagery cannot go." There are substantial moral and logical difficulties in believing in a God who tortures His enemies forever. Like Ingersoll, thousands of thinking men have turned away from such a God.—Tim Crosby in *Ministry*

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THE PASSION TO BE RIGHT

Roy Key

One day in the midst of a discussion my oldest daughter blurted out, "O, Dad, anything's all right with you, as long as it's perfect!" I haven't the slightest remembrance of how that discussion ended, but I think it was abruptly.

My family has so often accused me of being a “perfectionist” that I had to make an appointment for a spiritual check-up. One positive result was that I was made aware of a few characteristics I think we perfectionists need carefully to consider.

First, we have a host of good qualities, for which I’m grateful: super-conscientiousness, ability and willingness to work far beyond expectation, tremendous desire to please, extraordinary humility—until pushed too far.

Second, these qualities, however, reveal quite a bit: insecurity, desire for a love we’re sure we don’t deserve and are not certain we actually have, impatience with ourselves and others who do less than a perfect job, temptation to judge all who don’t work as long and hard as we do, etc., etc.

Third, it’s not just that our work must be perfect; our views must be as well. It’s often difficult to tolerate disagreement and downright humiliating to be caught wrong on a vital issue. Irritation for us becomes righteous indignation, and opposition becomes a personal attack. The world’s future rests on “the principle” that we alone uphold.

The faith-community which birthed and suckled us has an old slogan that goes:

In faith unity;
In opinions liberty;

In all things love.

One day I realized that my perfectionism as it tended toward judgmentalism hardly squared with this passionate profession. Furthermore, a question from the apostle Paul brought me up short and left me speechless, “Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls” (Ro. 14:4). He even declared, “The whole law is fulfilled in one word. . .” (Gal. 5:14), and, horrors, it wasn’t “perfection.”

It was a kind of revelation to me when the thought shot through my soul: *It is not better to be right than to care.* Nothing less than “amazing grace” assured me that God loves and accepts me-even when I’m wrong. Do you suppose that such grace is contagious?

Maybe it is. You and I had better press close to Jesus and find out. Yours for a quick incubation period.—*113 Wolf Road, Rogers, AR 72756*

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THE GOSPEL, UNITES US, NOT THEOLOGY

In Christ you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth. the gospel of your salvation; in whom also. having believed. you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. —Eph. 1:13

Paul's letter to the Ephesians can properly be described as the church's mandate for unity. There is a plea for unity among believers on virtually every page. It is in this letter that Christians are urged to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3), and it is here that the apostle lists the seven ones that serve as the basis for that unity: one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (Eph. 4:4-6).

The apostle is not in this case seeking to unite divided believers, for the Ephesians were already united. Paul urges them to preserve or keep the unity that was theirs as a gift of the Spirit. It was "the unity of the Spirit" that they were to preserve. That is a lesson within itself in that unity is not ours to create or to destroy, but to receive and keep as a gift from God.

In Eph. 1:13 Paul shows that it was the gospel or the word of truth that united the Ephesians in Christ. By virtue of hearing the gospel they trusted in Christ, which he refers to in verse 15 as "your faith in the Lord Jesus," and having believed they were stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit.

Does this not show that when one hears the gospel and goes on to believe and obey the gospel that he or she receives the Holy Spirit? And is it not being in Christ and being sealed with the Holy Spirit that unites us and makes us one? That is why Christian unity is the Spirit's unity. And does not that mean that all those in whom the Spirit dwells are one in Christ? And aren't they in Christ and recipients of the Spirit by hearing, believing, and obeying the gospel?

Now you have my thesis: *It is the gospel that unites us. not theology.* Paul in this context defines the gospel as "the word of truth" about Christ. Or it is the seven unities of Eph. 4. Or it is the facts of Christ' s death, burial, and resurrection as stated in 1 Cor. 15:3-4. Or it is "the message of the cross" of 1 Cor. 1:18. Or it is the proclamation of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" of 1 Cor. 2:2. It is the "good news" that is "the gospel of your salvation," not theology.

These are facts about what God has done through Christ. There are no opinions, theories, or theology in the gospel, only *about* the gospel. No theorizing or theologizing is necessary in order to hear, believe, and obey the gospel. We never divide over the gospel itself, but we often divide over theology.

An instance of this would be one of the first divisions in the history of the church, which led to the Council of Nicea in 325, which was called to formulate the "correct theology" about the nature of Christ. They all believed that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God and the risen Lord, which are facts of the gospel. But some of them began to theorize about the nature of Jesus' sonship. Was Christ "of the same substance" (*homoiousios*) as the Father or "of one substance" (*homoousios*) with the Father, thus distinguishing between the Father and the Son. The Nicean fathers ruled that the latter was the correct theology, that Christ and the Father were of one substance. In retrospect it appears to us as theological hairsplitting, but it was crucial to them.

Other theologians contended that one could believe that Christ and God were of one substance and still believe that they were distinct persons (*hypotaseis*). On and on the controversy went, dividing the church. There is no way to attain complete agreement on theology. The gospel itself, yes, but not theology. They even brought Mary the mother of Jesus into it. Since they made Christ "of one substance" with the Father, then Mary became the "God-bearer" (*theotokos*) and the Mother of God. That is theology, not gospel.

Since Nicea the church has debated thousands of theories and theologies, and they have often divided us asunder. The distinction is clear: the gospel or the word of truth is what the Scriptures actually say about Christ, while theology is what we think it means by what it says (and sometimes when it says nothing at all).

This does not mean that theology is bad. It is in fact good or can be, and we need to theologize—and there is much theology in the Bible! My point is that we must distinguish between the gospel and theology. The gospel unites us, and here we can all agree. We can all agree that Jesus Christ died for our sins, that is the gospel. But there are many theologies about the atonement that we will not see alike. But we don't have to see theology alike. We can have our theological debates and profit from them, and we can agree to disagree. But as to the gospel itself we are to agree and be of one heart and one mind.

It is the gospel that unites us—not theology, not theories, not opinions. You are free to have your theology, and you may be right therein; but you cannot bind it on others except as they come to see it as you do. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a different matter, for it is the "good news" that makes us one in Christ.

It is this distinction that led our pioneers to formulate the slogan, "In essentials (the gospel), unity; in opinions (theology), liberty; in all things, love."—*the Editor*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

During the holidays Ouida and I met with old friends that we've known for half a century, but for most of that time we've been out of touch, R. D Rawlings of Dallas, now a widower, and Larry and Jane Grounds. I was amazed how much older the rest of them looked! Larry, R. D., and I recalled how we used some questionable methods of evangelism in our youth, such as passing out anti-Catholic tracts following mass at the Dallas cathedral. It caused such a stir that the police were called, not to arrest us but to protect us. We agreed that we then had more zeal than wisdom, but we had one redeeming quality in that we were sincere and meant well. We recalled the adage "Young men for courage, old men for wisdom," and wondered why life could not be such that young and old alike could be both wise and courageous. It was good for Ouida to get away for a few hours and laugh over old times, even if she was the youngster in the crowd with all the rest of us already in our 70's. During the same trip to Dallas we visited another dear friend of many years, Lois Tate, who at 96 lives in a nursing home and is still alert. And we had Christmas Eve dinner with my sister and her prolific offspring, one of whom, Boone Powell, a grandson, is a star line-backer for the Texas Longhorns. He assured me they would beat Miami in the Cotton Bowl on New Year's Day and be declared national champions. I am not so sure. He's a big guy and handsome! Our daughter Phoebe sat with Mother Pitts while we were on this Dallas binge.

There are three denominations that are traditionally "peace churches," the Quakers, Mennonites, and Brethren. The mainline churches have generally supported the "just war" concept, and they have had little in common with the pacifist churches. A recent exception to this is a movement among the Baptists called the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America which has recently issued a "Call to Prayer and Fasting" in view of what they call "the rush to war in the Persian Gulf." In the "Call" they contradict the assumption "that our Lord's admonition to love our enemies is sentimental counsel only for the weak and the resigned," and they urge that we write our elected officials and insist that war in the Gulf is not inevitable and that a peaceful solution must be found. They urge that Christians everywhere fast and pray for peace, and ask that we sign a pledge to do so. Their address is 499 Patterson St., Memphis, TN 38111.

Olan Hicks, a Church of Christ minister, writes voluminously and travels widely in an effort to free our people from what he believes to be a legalistic and oppressive position on divorce and remarriage. He holds the position that any divorced person has the right, under God, to marry. In spite of bitter opposition he has done much to bring our people to a more compassionate and a more biblical position. His arguments are so compelling that the hard

liners will no longer debate him. In his newsletter he tells how amusing incidents sometimes accompany his serious mission. One editor rebuked Hicks for saying that a man "could but ought not" divorce his comatose wife. Hicks rejoined by noting that according to the hard line Church of Christ view a man could murder his comatose wife and be forgiven for it and afterward remarry, but he can't divorce his comatose wife and be forgiven for it and afterward remarry! We are "a peculiar people," aren't we? If you would like to receive Olan Hick's newsletter the address is Gospel Enterprises, Box 1253, Searcy, AR 72143.

We will announce again as we did last month that with this January issue we begin our last two-year cycle of publication. The final number of this journal will be December 1992. It will encourage us greatly and will help us to do more good our final two years if you will send us a list of new readers. You can do this in a club of three or more for only $4.00 per name. How about helping us have a strong finish.

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READER'S EXCHANGE

We must discontinue our unscriptural practice of relegating women to roles of second class citizenship in God's kingdom. We must allow them the rightful use of their experience and abilities in their "reasonable service" to God. Surely the Father is pleased when he "hears them, "his female children as well as males.—*Jim Gregory, Fresno, Ca.*

The biggest obstacle to unity is fear. When people have no assurance of salvation they tend to draw lines that if followed will give them that assurance. If the lines you draw are different from the ones I draw, somebody has to be wrong, and so we divide. If we were less concerned with religion and more concerned with being Christ-like, our arguments and line drawing would fade.—*David Himes, Burke, Va.*

I appreciate all you do to wake us up and shake us up and make us once again a true unity movement. I have read Fudge's book on *The Fire That Consumes* and appreciate your article on the same subject. There are probably more who believe this way than we realize.—*Bob Tinsley, South Bend, In.*

I am late in sending in my renewal, but what can you expect from one who just had his 84th birthday. At my age I don't buy green bananas any more!—*D. W. Conley, Big Spring, Tx.*

I can't agree with Henry Webb when he says in his history book that the Churches of Christ will have to accept instrumental music in a 21st century world. That the early church sang acappella cannot be dismissed as tradition. Practically every major reformer except Luther (and almost Luther) rejected instrumental music, including Calvin, Zwingli, Roger Williams, and Wesley, the founder of Methodism.—*Norman Parks, Murfreesboro, Tn.*

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BOOK NOTES

F. F. Bruce has made his mark in the area of important Christian literature. A new book of his collected essays, titled *A Mind For What Matters,* will be welcomed by those who appreciate Bruce's work. $19.95 postpaid.

The excellent historical novels of Louis Cochran on two of our famous pioneer preachers are back in print. *The Fool of God,* based on the life of Alexander Campbell, and *Raccoon John Smith,* the story of the back-woods preacher who played an important role in our history, are $11.95 each, postpaid.

You will want to read the article in this issue by Edward Fudge. We will send you a copy of his provocative book, *The Fire That Consumes,* for $23.50 postpaid. It is an important volume to add to your library.

We will soon have available the bound volume of this journal for 1989-90 with the title *The Hope of the Believer.* It will be an attractive hardbound edition with dust jacket and will match the other bound volumes. We would appreciate your ordering now, and the book will be sent to you with invoice enclosed, or you can enclose your check with your order. Our previous bound volume for 1987-88, titled *The Sense of Scripture,* is also available at $14.00 postpaid.

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